



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

June 8, 2006

News Release

ICE probe leads to indictment of four former members of Bosnian Serb military for immigration fraud

Defendants alleged to have served in army unit that committed human rights violations

SALT LAKE CITY – Four former members of the Bosnian Serb military appeared in federal court here this morning to face visa fraud charges, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) into allegations they failed to disclose their prior Bosnian Serb military service when they applied for immigration benefits, allowing them to relocate to the United States.

Yesterday, ICE agents arrested Milenko Stjepanovic, 55; Mirka Stjepanovic, 53; Ranko Nastic, 54; and Branko Ristic 46. All four defendants, who currently live in the Salt Lake City area, are citizens of the former Yugoslavia, now Bosnia-Herzegovina. Indictments unsealed this morning allege that they made materially false statements on their immigration benefit applications, failing to disclose that they had served in the Bosnian Serb military during the Balkan conflicts between 1992 and 1995.

Because of the atrocities committed by all sides during the Balkan conflicts, Bosnians who seek refuge in the United States are required to declare all military service, including service in the Bosnian Serb Army, on immigration forms.

While under oath, the defendants allegedly did not reveal their prior military service with the Army of the Republika Srpska, or the Vojska Republika Srpska (VRS). The VRS participated in human rights violations, including the Srebrenica massacre, which resulted in the capture and execution of thousands of Bosnian Muslim men and boys during 1995. The Srebrenica massacre has been classified as genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Individuals who have persecuted others are not admissible to the United States by law.

“We will not allow the United States to become a sanctuary for those using fraud and deception to qualify for refugee status,” said Joseph Romel, assistant special agent in charge for the ICE office of investigations in Utah. “These individuals willfully concealed their prior service in the military and this raises serious questions about their basic claims to eligibility.”

Acting U.S. Attorney for Utah Stephen J. Sorenson emphasized that the indictments returned by a Utah grand jury do not allege the defendants committed war crimes in Bosnia, but that they were members of the Vojska Republika Srpska, the Bosnian Serb military, and soldiers in the Zvornik Brigade, which played a role at Srebrenica. Sorenson said there have been some instances where VRS members admitted military service and, after careful review, were able to obtain status in the United States. When the military service is not disclosed, however, the review is not conducted.

“The failure of these defendants to list their military service on refugee applications and subsequent applications here in Utah to obtain permanent residency precluded proper and meaningful screenings of their cases,” Sorenson said. “We believe the immigration status each of these defendants presently enjoys was obtained by fraud.”

Visa fraud carries a potential maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The defendants are scheduled to stand trial in August. A hearing for Milenko Stjepanovic is scheduled for June 12 at 9:15 a.m. before U.S. Magistrate Judge David Nuffer.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.